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Walking as Experimental Poiesis

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Abstract

This experimental text, created by way of bricolage, is a form of mapping that activates relationships between the experience of the body, meanings accrued over time, and the inhabited landscape. This work situates the body as the first site and engages walking to open up fields of experimental making of meaning through experiences collected (visually, textually, physically, etc.) along the way. These experiences are forms of 'data' that over time, gain more meaning as the archive expands to include new references. Specifically, the walk being mapped begins in 2004 in Florianopolis, Santa Caterina, Brazil, and continues temporally through to today.

Résumé

Ce texte est un bricolage expérimental de cartographie qui connecte expériences corporelles, significations accumulées au fil du temps et paysages habités. Il prend le corps comme point de départ d'une promenade qui conduit vers des champs de création expérimentale de signification à travers des expériences réunies (visuellement, textuellement, physiquement, etc.) en chemin. Ces expériences sont comme des données qui acquièrent peu à peu de nouvelles significations, telles des archives accueillant de nouvelles références. Concrètement, la promenade cartographiée ici commença en 2004 à Florianopolis (Santa Caterina, Brésil) et se poursuit jusqu'à aujourd'hui.

** Katherine E. Bash, trained as a biologist, is an artist who creates Spatial Poetics. This experimental visual poetics engages the textual, the visual, and the landscape/site. 'The Atlas for Experimental Poiesis', an archive of her long-term inquiry has been established recently by the Center for Art + Environment, Nevada Museum of Art. She holds a PhD in Architectural Design from University College London and is the Principal Investigator of the Itinerant Laboratory for Perceptual Inquiry.*

WALKING AS EXPERIMENTAL POIESIS

Through walking we encounter the world.

We feel the weight of the rock in the right hand,
and the roundness of the pebbles in the left.

We feel the difference between the hard concrete surface and the change as it gives way to softness as we pass onto the grassy lawn. We feel the corridors of wind produced by the buildings around us and the sand in our eye. We watch the leaves gather momentum in those autumn winds and rush across pavements and gardens inspired by the way the sun heats the earth. Through walking we can go to places that when we sit we can only read about.

The world is in motion and while walking, so are we. Walking is the site of Physical Polylogue with the world. Polylogues are interactions where feedback proceeds in a multidirectional manner. (*Physical and linguistic polylogues are some variants. The participants in the Polylogue range widely*). We push against things and they push back. We can throw language at it and watch what happens. We can also pull language from it, a form of Poietical Phase Change. Sometimes nothing happens, or nothing appears to happen, but might appear at some other spatiotemporal point.

BUT SOMETIMES,

IT SURPRISES—ALL OF A SUDDEN—KNOCKS US OVER AND TAKES US WITH IT.

26 October 2004, at the *Praia Mole* (Soft Beach), *Santa Caterina, Brazil*.

I had no idea I was so inept at walking. I keep with me Francesco Careri's *Walkscapes: Walking as an Aesthetic Practice*, and do my best to transform walking into a polemic concept as well as an aesthetic tool to observe that through which I pass. The practice of walking is necessary: just the mechanics, the subtleties, the motions of walking. Rebecca Solnit, in *Wanderlust*, discusses walking as a democratic activity—almost all of us can do it. Walking *well*, however, is a different matter.

And so we must begin at the end, that is, the beginning, the end that is the beginning. The time that is both far away and,

Just past,

right underfoot.

Underfoot

is the grass,

the gravel,

the evenness of the concrete,

the change from the hardness of concrete

to the softness of the green grass,

the sharp point of the seed underfoot,

the seeds underfoot,

the rock

worn with time

now sand.

A sandy beach.

Standing toward the nose of the rock jutting into the water at Praia Mole, I turned around to locate the faint voice from behind, and discovered that someone was telling me something in Portuguese. He was ordering me to halt, telling me not to go further, especially not on the dark parts because those are wet and it is dangerous. Not only can you fall but the sea will all of a sudden surprise you, coming higher than you expect, possibly knocking you over and taking you with it.



Figure 1. *BeginEndsBegin*, Katherine E. Bash. Photograph, from the series *Practicing Place*. Praia Mole, Santa Caterina, Brazil. 2004.

Error—the deviation from a route, a departure from principles is bound to such wandering. As an act of navigation on a devious course, it implies rambling, roaming and even going astray.

The 'marches' was the name traditionally given to territories situated at the confines of a territory, at the edges of its borders. Walking [*la marche*] also designates a shifting limit, which is nothing other, in fact, than what's called a frontier. The latter always goes hand in hand with fringes, intermediary spaces, with undeterminable contours that can only really be made out when travelling through them.

Where is the boundary between the beginning and the end?

When does the beginning become the end?

When does the end become the beginning?

Heeding his warnings, I pause –;

and back up.

There is a beach on the other side that is a preserve; let us go. And so I followed.

And now I have come to the sea. The sea. The sea ends too, like everything else, but you see, here, too, it is a little like sunsets, the hard thing is to isolate the idea, I mean to say, to condense miles and miles of cliffs, shores and beaches, into a single image, into a concept that is the end of the sea, something that you may set down in a few lines, that may have a place in an encyclopedia, so that people, upon reading it, may understand that the sea ends, and how, independently of everything that may happen around it, independently of . . .

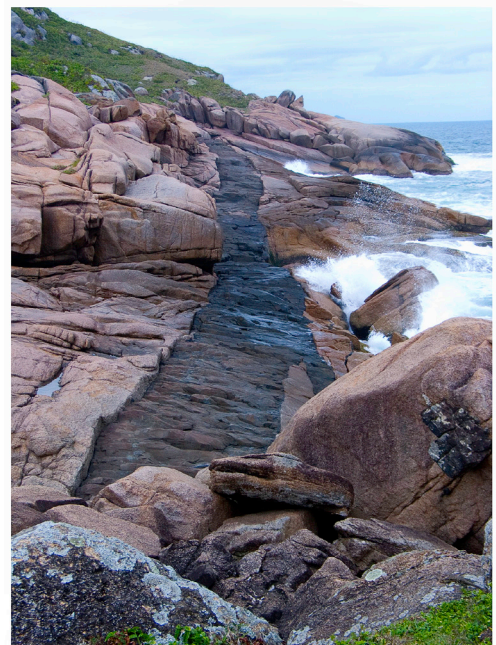


Figure 2. *Physical Polylogue*. Katherine E. Bash. Photograph. Santa Caterina, Brazil. 2004.

Crossing my first gap

with my new guide he offers me his hand, but rather than grab mine he insists: *mi pulsera*, my wrist. A firm secure grip. An authentic embodied move, it feels to me, not an imitation, but the thing itself, a movement that is also an archive of times and places, one that indicates practice over long periods of time. Where did you learn that, I asked? Years of climbing around here. If you grab my hand we can easily slip. And when you offer your *pulsera* to someone, you must make sure you are in a good position or they can take you down with them.

Bök | 56

you step across the chasms
between the words on these pages
taking care not to lose footing
yet you fall into them:
elevator shafts without cables

Why go over there, I asked? It is beautiful and there are no houses around. But why is that more beautiful? We see the marks of man all of the time: the houses, the roads, the cars; it is nice to be for a while just with the forces themselves, in direct contact, and to put aside all of those constructions which allow us, in the end, to be here now.

Careri | 36

In fact it is probable that it was nomadism, or more precisely 'wandering', that gave rise to architecture, revealing the need for a symbolic construction of the landscape. All this began well before the appearance of the concept of nomadism itself, during the intercontinental roving of the first [peoples] of the Paleolithic period, many millennia before the construction of temples and the cities.

Coming off of the hill, having passed through the green meshes, we stepped down onto the sands of the beach. No, you do not walk in tennis shoes on the beach. In spite of all of the beauty, if you walk in tennis shoes on the beach you might as well be at home. There is nothing to compare.

Interlude:

21 December 2009, *Sand Dunes, Monahans State Park, Texas.*

I step off of the sands of the inland sea of Monahans, my feet now sorely cold, and I receive a phone call.

it is necessary to keep the shoes off when walking here or else it is nothing,

it does nothing and it is as if I have never arrived

oh, you must do that to connect?

yes

Return to Praia Mole:

I take off my shoes and begin walking.

Careri | 20

The act of crossing a space stems from the natural necessity to move to find the food and information required for survival. But once these basic needs have been satisfied, walking takes on a symbolic form that has enabled man to dwell in the world. By modifying the sense of the space crossed, walking becomes man's first aesthetic act, penetrating the territories of chaos, constructing an order on which to develop the architecture of situated objects.

Just as soon as I am off and going, I am told that I should walk at the waterline, where my feet get wet every now and again; and then I am to rub my feet on the sand as it will clean them, making them shiny.

Baricco | 32

That is. . . you see there, where the water arrives. . . runs up the beach, then stops. . . there, precisely that point, where it stops. . . it really lasts no more than an instant, look there, there, for example, there. . . when the water stops, precisely that point, that curve. . . that is what I am studying. Where the water stops.

Also my toes, it can clean them as well. And so I go walking, on the shoreline, dragging my feet and my toes over and into the moist sand wondering just how shiny they will be at the end.

Walking over to a tube sticking out of the hill with water running out of it, he tells me cold showers in waterfalls are also good for you. Cold showers at home are also okay. They give you force. The hot ones take the force away. When you need force, take a cold waterfall shower; when you need to calm down, take a hot one.

More sand and directives to walk at the shoreline. And again how walking without shoes puts you here, walking in tennis shoes separates you from it—even if you are seeing and hearing all of this beauty.

Bruno | 15

The English language makes this transition from sight to site aurally seamless. Site-seeing, too, is a passage. As it moves from the optic to the haptic. . . [it seeks]. . . to address the emotion of the viewing space.

We approach the rocks where we find archaeological evidence: petroglyphs and *oficinas líticas* or rock offices. I ask what rock offices are and he says they are places to sharpen the points of arrows.

Vesely | 104

We experience the most obvious manifestations of the structuring role of architecture almost constantly in our everyday life. There is hardly a place or circumstance that is not organized by spatial intentions (or, in the case of natural surroundings, experiences as so organized). The encounter with things and their spatial order is an encounter with the otherness of our situation, accessible through the dialectics of revealing and hiding.



Figure 3. *Oficinas Líticas* (Rock offices). Katherine E. Bash. Photograph, from the series *Practicing Place*. Santa Caterina, Brazil. 2004.

But then he backs away and says that we were not there during the time when the rock offices were in use, so it is difficult to know and maybe better to use your own imagination—better, or just as useful. And thus, my mind fills with thoughts of Paleolithic peoples organised to create and complete these tasks, wearing down this lithic 'office' into smooth grooves whose placement allows the water to take away the hard won human-made sand.

Now we are ascending, albeit not very high, and at once I am told that I should have walked the other way. What? The one you took was easy, but there was another way that was more secure. When I step, I learned, I should not just look at my foot and that step, but several ahead to position myself, just right, and to take the best path.

Then we start to ascend where we have to use our hands.

Always keep one hand on the rocks, then look for the next good foothold.

We finally make it to the top where it is, well, beautiful.

Does this have anything to do with the fact that it was slightly terrifying to arrive?

The water is a striking blue with lighter and darker fields that I later determine are cloud shadows (a favourite phenomenon of mine). To see a cloud shadow, there must be enough smooth topology in conjunction with being at a great enough distance to view the edges (in a city for example, it is seldom possible—we are often in cloud shadows, but rarely can they be perceived).

Then we begin to talk about what I do.
I explore places, the making of places,
the making of meaning through places.

Vesely | 76

Making any discussion of the lived or natural world exceptionally difficult is the fact that we are always situated within it. . . . The main characteristic of the natural world is its continuity in time and space and its permanent presence, as can be seen most clearly in language. In language we can move into the past or future, survey different regions of reality, refer to almost anything in our experience, and translate the experience into specific languages.

Through practice, he adds, PRACTICING PLACE, *praticando o lugar*.

Yes, exactly that.

Then we talk about the division between thinking and practice. How many people read books these days but are so out of practice it does not matter what they read or learn. That place comes through practice. It is slow too and accumulates over time. We could return again and again to the same rock.

Praticando o lugar—What are all of the ways that we can practice place?

We do not just know place; place comes through us as we practice over time.

Day in and day out.

Just like any sport or activity.

Praticando o lugar is a concept I grasp as a new linguistic tool to guide my experience.

You walk like a child on the rocks and an adult on the sand. Maybe it was because the rocks hurt my feet. Rather than fighting his statement, as would be my initial reaction, I agree and wonder whether this was an observation or a directive. Climbing back off of the rock and onto the sand I realise that I have left my sun glasses up on top of the large granite rock flanked by the sea on both sides, a clear open blue. He goes back to fetch them and is back in seconds.

De Certeau | 101

Walking it selects and fragments the space traversed; it skips over links and whole parts that it omits. From this point of view, every walk constantly leaps, or skips like a child, hopping on one foot. It practices the ellipsis of conjunctive *loci*.

Walking, though fragmentary, creates a unity through experience.

We are headed for the hill where the paragliders are taking off.

Bruno | 1

As an *error*, site-seeing partakes in a shift away from the long-standing focus of film theory on sight and toward the construction of a moving theory of site.

He notes that I should go slowly, that there is no hurry. Take your time. Now we are walking and I am taking my time. Take your time when there is no hurry, but go quickly as soon it is necessary.

Vesely | 26

Whole areas of nature and life are beyond our capacity to comprehend—and yet those very areas exert the greatest influence on the nature of our world.

He asks if I believe I could have been an insect in my past life. I respond yes, and he asks which one, as I look down and see a beached dragonfly. He bends down, picks it up, and places it in the littoral brush—noting that it has probably ingested water or been taken by the sea, and maybe it will dry out and find life once again.

Looking at the shoreline I see a number of pods that are opening. I ask where they came from. When there is a high tide the ocean takes them with it, but then it spits them back out, always. The ocean spits it all back out. It led me to feel that this was a thinking being and a strong force that I had to respect—spitting out all of the trash. It is a strong image even if it is not that simple.

He then veers away from the shoreline to give our feet time to dry out before we put our shoes back on. That way we do not have to bear wet feet in otherwise dry shoes.

We go climbing on the rocks and the sand in between—the intertidal part where the waves will come crashing again sometime soon. He says to keep my eyes on the waves and on the rocks so that when a wave approaches I can jump onto the rocks.

Baricco | 89

Do you know what is beautiful here? Look: we walk, we leave all those footprints on the sand, and they stay there, precise, ordered. But tomorrow you will get up, you will look at this enormous beach and nothing will remain, not a footprint, not a sign, nothing. The sea rubs things out during the night. The tide conceals. It is as if no one had ever passed by here. It is as if we had never existed. If there is, in the world, a place where you can fancy yourself nothingness, that place is here. It is land no longer, it is not yet sea. It's not sham life, it's not real life.

It's time. Time that passes. That's all.

I am still taking my time when he tells me to hurry up. But you said to take your time and that we did not have to hurry, I replied. When we need to hurry we need to hurry, when we do not need to hurry we do not need to hurry; now it is time to hurry. Again, a strong image even if its practice is more complex.

Careri | 26

The aim is to indicate walking as an aesthetic tool capable of describing and modifying those metropolitan spaces that often have a nature still demanding comprehension, to be filled with meanings rather than designed and filled with things. Walking then turns out to be a tool which, precisely due to the simultaneous reading and writing of space intrinsic to it, lends itself to attending to and interacting with the mutability of those spaces, so as to intervene in their continuous becoming by acting in the file, in the here and now of their transformation, sharing from the inside in the mutations of these spaces that defy the conventional tools of contemporary design.

We arrive at an uphill, and he tells me that it is how you breathe. You must breathe in through your nose and out your mouth. At various times on the uphill he stops to physically demonstrate, pointing to his nose and then to his mouth. Once we ascend to the top we watch those that can take off paragliding in a play with winds and gravity near the sea.

.

There is a walk over there to the right—we can take it. The moon will be out and it is beautiful. Few tips now as maybe it is easier terrain or maybe I am getting better at this walking thing. The sun hangs lower and I observe the terminator shadow (the shadow of the earth projected into the sky), turning opposite the setting sun, upside down with the island Xavier and the moon rising.

The sky puts on the darkening blue coat
held for it

by a hilltop overlooking the sea
and we repose on the rocks,
waves crashing way below,
the moon still rising,
the lights coming on in the distance.

It is cold and windy and for what seems like a few hours we again pass in silence as we had
done at the other rock outcropping.

Sitting in silence.

He tells me that he likes waiting for the full moon to rise in all of its glorious orange and yellow over the ocean on the night following the lunar eclipse.

Interlude:

The lunar eclipse, 2004, *Praia Mole, Santa Caterina, Brazil.*

Watching the moon I see its light cast on the water reflection in the distance, quite wide as
the wind is blowing hard from the north and the waves scatter themselves, dispersing the
light. The light follows us wherever we go. I always wonder about seeing the light that we just
saw a moment ago. No one is seeing it anymore. The near impossibility of being. Does the
light shine if there is no surface off of which to reflect?

Return:

Rilke | 13

and leave you (inexpressibly to unravel)
your life, with its immensity and fear,
so that, now unbounded, now immeasurable,
it is alternately stone in you and star

Walking in the moonlight brings its own lessons. Distances appear shorter in the dark. I posit that it is because we have fewer visual cues, confounding the senses. The density of visual cues which make the metronome of time and distance, the pace we have accustomed ourselves to, an embodied metronome that our bodies have adjusted to telling us how far we have gone.

This too could be applied by the ways that thoughts work. Perceiving in the active tense is also a big clue around here. Observe the changes when we observe.

In the dark it is best to first know the trail, I am told (no wonder I am terrified), and not to take this fantastic moonlit walk if you do not know the trail. Then it is good to step in the dark areas. These are depressions, and the higher brighter areas might lead you to fall as they are moist and smooth—hence reflective—easy to slip on (thank you for letting me know).

Vesely | 101

Memory is situational and no amount of isolated 'data' or memories can restore or simulate the concreteness of the human situation. Memory does not contain 'memories'. That its seat is not in the brain, which only contributes to the articulation of remembered experience and to our awareness of the past; that it is mostly latent; and that it is an intrinsic dimension of our world and our ability to understand.

After walking in the moonlit areas, it is time to descend to the area of darkness, on the other side of the hill blocking the moonlight.

In the dark, if you do not already know your way, well you just have to use your intuition.

pause

reflect

lago

lago

mar

vento

lagoa lagoa

lagoa

MAR

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península

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CONSTRUCTED GEOGRAPHIES

The general geographical	PORTUGUESE	ENGLISH
location of these Text	lago	lake
Maps are the areas of	vento	wind
Florianópolis, Santa	chuva	rain
Caterina, Brazil. The	lagoa	lagoon
following pieces are both	mar	sea
maps as well as scores	oceano	ocean
for a performance. They	peninsula	peninsula
can be read aloud and	continente	continent
performed.	riacho	stream

A SHORT GLOSSORIAL CONCLUSION

POLYLOGUE

A chorus where voices chime in of their own accord but only exist if listened to. An interaction that provides feedback, and proceeds in a multidirectional manner with multiple participants. Physical and linguistic dialogues are some possibilities.

PHYSICAL POLYLOGUE

A Polylogue created by the physical encounter with the things and events of the world, the imagination and translation of them into spatial experience, in an iterative manner, opening new room again for experimentation and transformation.

POIESIS

A form of threading forward existing conditions into the process of making such that what is made links the process as a thread of Ariadne.

PHASE CHANGE

The change in state of a phenomenon including the phases of water, and those of language (from observation into the topography of form).

TEXTUALISATION

The act of weaving oneself into a text through the process of interpretation, glossing, and translation (including transformation).

TEXT MAP

Process of phase change and scaling out a degree or more of magnitude from a site or experience, to observe the language that remains.

TRANSLATION

Movement from one place to another in physical form, from one medium to another in conceptual form or from one language to another in linguistic form (though what is a language is not clearly defined in this glossary).